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ABSTRACT

There are many procedures to use in the evaluation of student achievement in reading. Each has its pros and cons. No single approach will be perfect, but with a variety of approaches a teacher may determine how much progress each student has made. Standardized, norm-referenced tests, once so popular, have come into disfavor as reading evaluation methods because educators are coming to believe that it is not best to compare one student to another, but rather to assess each student's individual progress. In addition, there are no objectives that a teacher has access to in teaching students to do better on a norm-referenced test. It is assumed that all students have had access to the same or a similar curriculum. Criterion-referenced tests avoid some of the weaknesses of norm-referenced tests. Objectives are available for teacher use, and a major task of the teacher becomes aligning learning opportunities in reading with the stated objectives. Of course, there are some disadvantages to criterion-referenced tests, including the difficulty teachers may have in locating activities that harmonize with the stated objectives. Teacher observation is another way student reading achievement is assessed. The contextual assistance provided by the reading teacher as well as self-analysis by the involved student may really assist reading development. Discussions and conferences with pupils provide other ways to evaluate reading achievement. Another approach is through the use of portfolios, an approach that has become quite popular. Using the results from evaluation of student reading, a better reading curriculum could be developed. The best objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures should be stressed in ongoing lessons and units in the teaching of reading. (SLD)

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Evaluation of Reading Progress

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EVALUATION OF READING PROGRESS

There are numerous procedures to use in the evaluation of pupil achievement in reading. Each has its pros and cons. No approach will be perfect. Hopefully, with a variety of approaches, teachers may determine how much progress each pupil has made in reading. Methods of teaching reading differ much from each other presenting a further problem in evaluation. An older approach in evaluation that has come in disfavor emphasized the use of standardized tests. These are also called norm referenced tests. In a norm referenced test, pupils are compared with each other in reading achievement. This is quite obvious when viewing test results from pupils in any classroom or entire school. Thus, pupils may range from the ninety-ninth percentile to the first percentile in comparison with the group the test was standardized on. The ninety-ninth percentile has ninety-nine out of 100 pupils being below his/her standard whereas the child on the first percentile has one percent below and ninety-nine above this percentile from the group that the norm referenced test was standardized on. The standardized test has built in features to spread pupils out on a continuum. The spreading out of scores is done deliberately so that any pupil taking the standardized test may be compared in results with those of the standardization or group norm. When the norm referenced test was developed, the test makers had to develop a reference point as to where one's own pupil would be in progress, such as the fiftieth percentile, meaning out of 100 pupils taking the norm reference test, fifty percent would be above and fifty percent below the fiftieth percentile. The fiftieth percentile then represents an average or median for a pupil's test results.

Why have standardized, norm referenced tests come into disfavor? The thinking of many

educators is that pupil achievement should not be compared one against the other. Rather, each pupil is an individual and should learn to read as well as possible. Standardized tests usually measure vocabulary development, reading comprehension and phonics. The results can be used by the reading teacher to notice areas of diagnosis. However, many times the results from pupils taking the test are not available. If the results are available, the reading teacher may use what are deemed relevant items that are missed by pupils and use these as objectives for learners to attain. Thus, if a pupil is weak on reading to follow directions, the teacher might wish to work with pupils in strengthening this area of weakness. Or, if a pupil reveals from norm referenced test results that he/she is lacking in vital learnings in phonics, he/she may receive assistance by the teacher in using relevant sound/symbol relationships in improving skills in reading. Judgements need to be made by teachers in choosing objectives in reading for pupils to attain.

There are no objectives that a teacher has access to in teaching pupils to do better on norm referenced tests. Norm referenced tests appear to be global in nature in that all pupils are assumed to have had access to the same/similar curriculum. The manual section of a norm referenced test will state how the test items were selected and on which group the test was standardized upon. Test data on the norm referenced test are also given in the manual section of the standardized test. Thus, the validity and reliability of the test is provided to the reviewer or user. To provide for a wide range of scores, test developers of norm referenced tests use the following statistical procedures:

1. a test item from the pilot study is good if the individuals with the highest total responded correctly.

2. conversely, a poor test item is one in which the highest scorers on the total test missed that

test item.

Thus, there is a built in factor when test takers take a norm referenced test whereby the range of scores from high to low are quite great. It might be that the lowest score was on the first percentile whereas the highest score on the total test was on the ninety-ninth percentile. Weaknesses of standardized tests are the following:

1. no objectives are available for teachers to use as guidelines in teaching.

2. validity may be lacking since a teacher's pupils may not have had opportunities to study that which was on the test.

3. reliability may be weak in that the consistency of test results in taking the same test may vary from one time to the next by the same pupil(s) taking the test, be it in test/retest, split half, or alternate forms reliability.

Criterion Referenced Tests

Criterion referenced tests (CRTs) were developed in response to taking out some of the weaknesses of standardized tests. Thus, the objectives in reading instruction are available for teachers to use in teaching. A major task of the teacher is to align learning opportunities in reading with the stated objectives. The teacher then needs to choose learning opportunities which provide for pupils on different achievement levels in reading. Each pupil needs to be encouraged and taught to achieve the precise objectives. The objectives are usually stated in measurable terms so that a pupil either does or does not achieve the stated goals. Evaluation then is measured in terms of pupils having achieved the measurably stated objectives on the CRT. The CRT tests pupils to notice which objectives have/have not been achieved. The philosophy of testing is quite different when comparing norm referenced versus criterion referenced tests. There

ideally is no spreading out of pupil's scores on a CRT. The ideal is to have many or all pupils achieve the measurably stated objectives. A spread of scores is not desired since the teacher teaches all pupils in a class to achieve the predetermined objectives on the CRT. The results from the CRT may be used diagnostically in that teachers may teach what pupils missed on the CRT, providing those items were deemed important in reading.

Disadvantages in using CRTs include the following:

1. the highly precise objectives of reading instruction may encourage rote learning.
2. teachers may find it difficult to locate learning activities in reading that harmonize with the stated objectives.
3. pupils may have a desire to work on personally chosen projects and activities in reading.

Contextualism in Reading Evaluation

Norm referenced tests emphasize an outside source that evaluates pupil achievement in reading. Educators outside the personal teaching domain determine what goes into a paper pencil test.

The question arises as to the role of the classroom teacher in appraising learner progress in reading. After all, the teacher is trained and educated to appraise pupil achievement in reading. Then too, what is the role of the pupil himself/herself in determining reading achievement? Thus, the teacher may assist pupils within a contextual learning situation in reading to improve performance. In context, the pupil reveals progress and achievement. With personal monitoring of pupils, the reading teacher is in a good position to assist learners and should be able to determine sequence in learning activities for pupils, rather than an outside source such as test writers, far removed from the local teaching and learning scene. As the need arises, the teacher

may provide assistance inductively and/or deductively. The reading teacher appraises progress of the pupil in reading within the actual teaching and learning situation. Here, the evaluation is much more subjective as compared to numerical results of pupils in either the norm referenced or criterion referenced tests. Subjectivity is involved in the two types of tests given to pupils to measure pupil achievement in reading. Or is it more subjective? Norm referenced tests provide percentile ranks, standard deviations above and below the mean, stanine scores, and mean, median, and mode test results. Numerals are then given pupils for achievement results from norm referenced tests. I maintain these data are equally subjective as compared to teacher observation in constructivism approaches to ascertain learner progress in reading instruction. Why? Human beings write test items for testing be it norm referenced or CRT tests. They are tried out in pilot studies. There is much manipulating of data to obtain a spread of scores in norm referenced tests from making comparisons among pupils from testing. Merely because numerical results are available of pupils due to testing does not make for objectivity. This does not do away with the use of these tests either. The teacher may use test results to plan the reading curriculum for pupils. Pupils then might reveal what was missed and is relevant for teaching and learning situations in reading instruction.

With teacher observation, the reading instructor may observe how well pupils are doing in reading such as the following:

1. grapheme/phoneme associations made by individual learners while reading orally.
2. comprehension of subject matter, such as facts, concepts, generalizations, and main ideas.
3. creative and critical thinking emphasized in ongoing lessons and units of study. These criteria may be used in narrative, expository; and novel, original content read.

4. problem solving skills displayed in reading content.

5. purposes in reading such as to follow directions, skim, scan, identify questions, clarify ideas, compare and contrast content, check hypotheses, gather information to answer questions, summarize, develop conclusions, detect bias, evaluate subject matter read, formulate an opinion, understand graphic materials, interpret ideas, and appreciate literature.

The reading teacher with quality criteria may diagnose and assist to remedy deficiencies in pupil achievement. Teacher observation can be a powerful approach in evaluating pupil achievement in contextual reading. Areas of diagnosis should not interfere with pupils enjoying and liking to read content in the literature curriculum. Reading is holistic and should not be segmented into isolated content through phonetic analysis, syllabication, as well as syntactic and semantic segments. The major goal in reading is to guide pupils to be lavish consumers of quality literature.

Pupils need to be guided to monitor their own skills and comprehension in reading. Thus, learners individually may appraise their personal achievement by answering the following questions:

1. Do I attach meaning to what is being read?

2. Do I read fluently and make corrections along the way as new interpretations come about?

3. Do I call words when reading but lack understanding of what is being read?

4. Do I read very cautiously when I could be reading fluently and yet attach meaning to what is being read?

5. Do I have an inward desire to improve in reading more fluently?

6. Do I read on my own when free time is available?

7. Do I like to read orally to others?

8. Do I go overboard in using phonics to identify unknown words?

9. Do I enjoy sharing ideas read with others?

10. Do I ask for help in reading, be it in word recognition or comprehension in reading?

Pupils need to monitor the self in reading achievement. This may be a major way in guiding pupils to achieve as optimally as possible in reading. I believe that contextual assistance provided by the reading teacher as well as self analysis by the involved pupil may truly assist in developing a nation of readers. The reading teacher and the pupil learning to read are in the best position to monitor and appraise the latter's achievement in reading.

Discussions in the Reading Curriculum

From content read pertaining to the basal reader or individualized plans of reading instruction, it is important for the teacher to be a good leader of discussions. After all, it is one way to appraise learner comprehension. Reading teachers need to be certain that all pupils have an opportunity to participate in discussions in the classroom. Content may cut across all curriculum areas where reading has been emphasized. To have good discussions, the teacher needs to be certain that pupils have adequate background information, prior to reading subject matter. Also, pupils need to relate the subject matter to their very own personal lives. Too frequently what pupils read is not understood due to not possessing relevant content that is personally satisfying. We ourselves may lack comprehension in reading due to our inability to relate to what has been experienced in print discourse. But, if the sequence is good, we will have enough previous information that relates to the new subject matter read. It is an important role of the teacher to provide the necessary background experiences for pupils. An at risk pupil may

truly lack these experiences as might other pupils in the classrooms. With background experiences provided as well as relating the subject matter to be read to the pupil's own personal life will assist in comprehending and understanding the new ideas encountered. After the actual act of reading of content by the pupil, the teacher's role is to plan and implement a quality discussion. Pupils should be guided to stay on the topic during the discussion; however, creative comments and questions need to be given adequate attention. No one pupil should dominate the discussion, nor refrain from participating. The teacher should desire to evaluate all pupils in reading comprehension. Each pupil needs to develop feelings of belonging. Thus, pupils have positive attitudes that they are accepted as persons and for ideas presented. Recognition for ideas presented is a must! Each person likes to be praised for what is done well. No person desires to have his/her ideas rejected. I would like to bring a personal example into the print discourse here. When I was a junior in high school during the 1944-45 school year, each English student was asked to write a short story. My title was "Death on Second Floor," a strange topic for a General Conference Mennonite pacifist group to write on. Each writing was displayed on the walls of the classroom. Students in class were to rate the short stories on a competitive basis, from the lowest to the highest on a five point scale. Out of a class of twenty-five students, my writing was rated second highest in class. After the ratings were in, I commented to the English teacher how surprised I was in receiving that high a rating among classmates. She replied, "I am glad that you recognized your paper really did not have much worth." What a let down! That remark has stayed with me very clearly all these years. If the English teacher truly did not like my writing, she should not have said so because students were doing the rating and judging. If my writing was inferior, the teacher should have not made negative comments but indicated ways to improve

the print discourse. Helpful comments said in a positive way can go a long way to assist students to improve in written work. That also goes for reading endeavors pupils are engaged in. Reading and writing are directly related to each other and should possess oneness, not separate items of achievement.

Pupil achievement in discussions held pertaining to content read should

1. encourage further reading.
2. emphasize appreciation of literature.
3. stress clarity of expression.
4. implement quality sequence of ideas expressed.
5. aim to guide pupils to appraise themselves.
6. guide each pupil to make continuous progress.
7. help pupils to be responsible for their very own achievement.
8. set high, reasonable goals for learners to attain in reading.
9. use a variety of ways for pupils to indicate reaching of desired goals.
10. stress a balance between collaborative as compared to individual efforts in reading skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Being a good participant in a discussion needs to be learned and practiced. Teachers, administrators, and parents need to support efforts for pupils to achieve in becoming democratic participants in discussions involving the reading curriculum.

Conferences with Pupils

The elementary teacher in a self contained classroom has few opportunities to have individual conferences with pupils. The conference idea is to be supported so that the teacher

may closely study a pupil's achievement in reading. The reading teacher needs to evaluate comprehension skills of pupils such as understanding facts, concepts, generalizations, and main ideas read. Skills to be appraised should emphasize critical and creative thinkings, as well as problem solving. Early primary grade pupils will need to be evaluated on proficiency in using word identification skills. These skills may include phonics and use of context clues, in particular.

Attitudinal objectives to be attained by learners include developing an inward desire to read, becoming increasingly proficient in reading, and wanting to share ideas obtained from reading with other pupils (Ediger, 1998).

From this conference, reading teachers obtain objectives that need to be stressed in the curriculum. The objectives reflect upon what pupils are weak in, as far as ongoing lessons and units of study in reading are concerned. Remediation follows diagnosis.

The teacher may also appraise himself/herself in the teaching of reading when conducting conferences with pupils in the classroom. The teacher needs to answer the following questions in teaching pupils:

1. Did I inspire pupils in wanting to read?
2. Did I have reading materials available to provide for slow, average, and fast achievers?
3. Did each pupil achieve as much as possible in making progress in reading?
4. Did I assist each pupil, as needed, to become a better reader?
5. Did I use methods of teaching that encouraged and assisted pupils in learning to read well? (Ediger, 1997).

Using Portfolios

The use of portfolios has become quite popular in evaluating pupil achievement in reading.

Portfolios are quite valuable to use in parent/teacher conferences to appraise learner progress in reading. They may also be used to inform administrators and guidance counselors of a pupil's achievement in learning to read. What should comprise a reading portfolio for a pupil? I suggest the following items to become inherent:

1. diary entries kept on what was accomplished in reading on a somewhat daily basis.
2. journal writing whereby a pupil records ideas obtained, skills learned, and attitudes acquired from reading.
3. snapshots of projects and construction items completed in a lesson or unit of study.
4. cassette recordings of oral reading.
5. test results.
6. papers written involving reading activities.

The portfolio needs to have a table of contents to refer the evaluator to the items therein. A representative sampling of a pupil's work should appear in his/her portfolio. The portfolio should not become too voluminous, nor be too limited in terms of scope as to what is being evaluated.

Conclusion

There are a variety of evaluation techniques that the reading teacher may use to appraise pupil progress. Carefully developed procedures to notice learner achievement in learning to read should be in the offing. Based on pupil results from evaluation, an improved reading curriculum might well come into being. The best objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures should be stressed in ongoing lessons and units in the teaching of reading.

Selected References

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